

# CHICO VIEWSPAPER



WHERE CHICOANS EXPLORE  
THE ISSUES THAT MATTER

SUMMER 2013

## THE REAL MEANING OF PATRIOTISM

I was thrilled when the editorial committee for the *Chico Viewspaper* invited me to introduce the juicy topic of its second edition: The Real Meaning of Patriotism.

When patriotic fellow citizens declare the USA to be “number one,” I ask: “How so?”

The average US citizen will create 13 times more ecological damage than an average Brazilian, and use 53 times the resources of an average Chinese person. The US is 39<sup>th</sup> in income equality, 142<sup>nd</sup> out of 150 in infrastructure investment, our unemployment percentage is worse than 102 of 200 countries, and we’re 21<sup>st</sup> in freedom from corruption. A TV character from Aaron Sorkin’s *Newsroom* reminds us of some more sobering facts: “We’re 7<sup>th</sup> in literacy, 27<sup>th</sup> in math, 22<sup>nd</sup> in science, 49<sup>th</sup> in life expectancy, 178<sup>th</sup> in infant mortality. We lead the world only in... defense spending, and number of incarcerated citizens per capita.” This TV personality punctuates his claim that “America is *not* the greatest country in the world” with “*anymore*. We sure used to be.”

Laying aside the question of how well non-dominant groups were ever served by US greatness, there is no doubting that conditions for a majority of citizens have deteriorated. Up to about a generation ago, *patriotism* was understood to be more or less a

two-way street. It meant that US citizens would ask not what the country could do for them, but what they could do for their country, in the context of a nation that promoted the general welfare of the people, and that didn’t waste trillions of taxpayer dollars on war profiteers, a failed drug

war, bank bailouts and domestic spying.

Something has happened. That something has a lot to do with enough of us buying into the notion that the American Dream is fulfilled in the insatiable acquisition of things, and in a bloodless Wall Street moneysport where a few “winners” accrue all the wealth, leaving devastated ecosystems, rampant poverty and destabilized countries in their wake.

When patriotic folks declare love for their country, I ask: “What, precisely, do you love, and how do you demonstrate that love?”

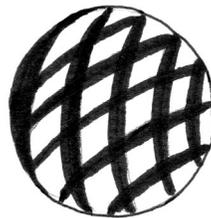
I ask because Patriotism is all about love. One reason I work with the Chico Peace & Justice Center (CPJC) is because it is grounded in love for this country’s people, its wilderness, and its potential. CPJC is guided by a whole-systems approach to the forming of a more perfect union, starting with every decision each one of us makes.

CPJC holds that a genuinely fulfilled American Dream builds from the village up a nation of communities that ensure freedom, justice, kindness, food, clothing, shelter, education, meaningful work and health care for everyone, by sustainable, innovative, nonviolent means that maximally preserve ecosystems, and that don’t require wars as part of an unsustainable effort to secure foreign-based resources.

The essence of patriotism, to many of us at CPJC, lies in pursuing this dream with an Apollo-project level of ambition, a WW2 level of willingness to sacrifice, and passionate civic involvement in obtaining accurate information, shaping public policy, and making every moment and dollar we spend a deliberate investment toward this reality.

Consider yourself warmly welcomed to the *Viewspaper*’s patriotism issue, where six Chicoans dig in for real meaning on a fascinating topic!

*Julie Estep is the CPJC Board President.*



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ISH GREEN

My mother, brother and I stood around the plastic flag we'd come outside to hang for Memorial Day.

"Isn't the bit between the pole and the flag a bit...long?" I asked uncertainly.

"Only the finest China can produce!" my brother commented. "Ha."

Mom twisted the flag around the pole to shorten the inordinate distance and make it look more normal.

"No, now the eagle's facing backward," my brother pointed out. "Just hang it like normal, it's only going to be up there a day anyway."

I looked skyward. "It's raining...aren't we not supposed to hang it when it's raining or something?"

Mom shrugged. "Well, yeah, but...it's plastic. It'll be fine." Everyone agreed to the logic of that.

With the flag securely in its holder, my brother shouted, "AH ten SHUN! Arms, to the ready! Salute!" as he does at his Civil War reenactments, mimicking out the motions as Mom and I watched him do his thing. We all looked at the flag for a second, and then went back inside.

That was pretty much the extent of our Memorial Day celebrations...a plastic flag made in China and a Civil War-era salute. It seemed important to acknowledge the day's meaning anyway.

My thoughts on American patriotism have always been a jumble between the faith I had growing up believing in the American dream—the dream of all people having a place here, everyone welcome to stay and start anew, with common humanity binding us together—and the much grimmer reality of systematic colonization and the disenfranchisement of minority populations, and the valuing of money over human beings that founds and fuels our economy.

A great deal of my present beliefs about patriotism stem from my experiences observing how other people in other cultures feel and understand patriotism. There was no doubt in the mind of the Turks I met that Turkey was by far the best country in the world and that Turkey's founder, Atatürk, was the rarest and wisest leader ever to walk the earth. In Europe, Africans and Middle-Eastern immigrants are discriminated against, often so blatantly there is no cultural agreement that racism is a bad thing, because the ba-

sis for belonging is based around ancestry. I once asked a French girl why France was outlawing the wearing of the hijab by Muslim women in schools. She said it wasn't French to wear the hijab. I asked what it meant to be French, and she listed off things like wine and good food, but what she actually meant was of French descent—white and adhering to certain cultural homogeneities. No matter how much wine and good food a French citizen of African descent enjoys, they will never truly be accepted as French by many.

The best thing about America is that anyone can be their own kind of American, and in so doing, make America reflect their own faces and histories and voices. America is not owned by the white-bread Joe the Plumber stereotype. America is the crowd in Chicago on the night Obama was elected—all colors, genders, and ages.

The fact that the complicated, messy reality of America rarely lives up to this isn't as important as the fact that it is indeed a dream, a goal, a common understanding of our society. To be American isn't based on skin color, religion, or class—which is an American dream far from that of the Founding Fathers with

their 3/5ths of human beings and voting rights only to propertied white men. This American dream is one that has grown from the seeds planted by the ideals of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

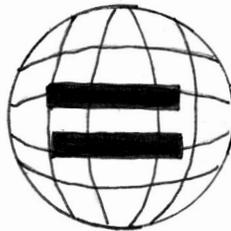
This is an American dream of equality dreamt by Martin Luther King, Jr., Gloria Steinem, Harvey Milk, and Cesar Chavez, and it is a dream for all of us.

*Isb Green is an advocate working with victims of domestic violence, a cheerful wanderer, and a general life enthusiast.*



We are filled with the Popular Wisdom of several centuries just past, and we are terrified to give it up. Patriotism means obedience, age means wisdom, woman means submission, black means inferior—these are preconceptions embedded so deeply in our thinking that we honestly may not know that they are there.

*Gloria Steinem*



# THE POWER OF A FALSE IDEA

TOM IMHOFF

A couple of years back while serving as a faculty consultant for Chico State students writing essays on war, defense, and international relations as part of the "Great Debate" program, I was startled by the thesis of one bearded young man. After nearly a quarter century of instructing young people I don't startle easily. But this fellow gave me pause. His thesis was simple: America First! Whatever was required to promote U.S. interests, whether invading Middle Eastern countries, torturing detainees in secret or not so secret prisons, promoting drone strikes to kill the bad guys (as well as many not so bad guys—the combatant/noncombatant distinction being irrelevant so long as the assassinations promoted U.S. interests), yearly committing hundreds of billions of tax dollars to feed the Pentagon's war making machine, was good. If it promotes U.S. interests, it should be done. Welcome to patriotism North American style—unfortunately a style all too widespread.

Such sentiment happens to be immune to reason. Why are so many committed to such death dealing views? It is an old problem as European socialists discovered when the drums of war began beating at the beginning of the 20th century. Socialists of all varieties, and there are many, had become politically potent in the old world as the new century dawned. The attraction of universal health care, workers rights, no cost education for all, pensions for the old, care for the infirm, held then, as now, great appeal. Political leaders representing the major European powers had other ideas. It was time, they saw, for a redrawing of the colonial world map. Socialist leaders saw all this. They were confident that war would not come, at least not for their members. Socialists would never sign up to fight and die in imperial wars. Workers dying to promote the interests of owners—ludicrous! The shocking reality, however, was that socialists on all sides volunteered in droves to fight socialists wearing the uniforms of opposing empires—a socialist disaster. The reason was patriotism: my nation first!

Intellectually this should not make sense: there is no such thing as a nation. Nations are abstract concepts. Nations are not concrete, living beings. This is an important point—since only living beings can

have interests. Nations are not living beings—so they have no interests. There are no such things as American interests. There are no reasons of state for which wars should be fought, since there is no state to do the fighting, states being abstract concepts. What does exist are people. People have interests. People can be grouped according to their interests. Political scientists study such groups, interest groups, if one speaks politely, classes if one wishes to explain why wars get fought: dominant interest groups promoting their shared interests agitate for war, benefit from war, and become measurably more powerful and wealthy as a result of war. Nations don't make war, armies make war (armies made up mostly of working people) to protect and promote the interests of wealthy owners. This is the dynamic of war.

But why do workers, that is, most of us, volunteer to promote interests not our own, interests opposed to our own? It is because we are taught falsely that nations exist and that our nation is our symbolic family. We all grew up in families. We know family.

Patriotism is just the concept of the state dressed up in the clothing of the family. And we believe this falsehood! We think that "America First!" means my family first. This makes sense to us, but it is false. America is not a family. It is not our family. The power of patriotism, and it is powerful, is based on a falsehood—a supremely, emotionally, powerful falsehood.

*Since 1989 Tom Imhoff has enjoyed life with his spouse and peace-activist-mentor, Diane. He teaches peace studies, environmental ethics, and criminal justice ethics, at California State University, Chico, for the Philosophy Department.*



My patriotism is not an exclusive thing. It is all-embracing and I should reject that patriotism which sought to mount the distress or exploitation of other nationalities. By patriotism I mean the welfare of the whole people, if I secure it at the hands of my opponent, I should bow down my head to him.

*Mohandas Gandhi*

# MATRIOTISM

MERCEDES MACÍAS MARÍN

When I was 12 years old, I was called a “beaner.” I didn’t know what the word meant, but the way it was fired zipped straight through my ears and deep into my spirit. I was hurt; I felt assaulted. I ran home to my mother and asked her what the word meant. She looked at me with sadness and said nothing. That word had been spat with such malice and hatred that it might as well have been a vat of acid, burning my eyes to tears. She held me.

When I was 15, I met a young Chinese man and developed a romantic relationship with him over the next four years of our early adulthood. We lived together and grew together and, in 2008, travelled overseas to live with his friends and family in mainland China. For three months, we lived in both urban cities and rural countryside. As a Youth-Ambassador to the Australian continent in 2007, I spent time among both Native Aboriginal people and a “typical” family of “white-Aussies.” These sorts of experiences convinced me that all the humans I had encountered in my life were equally valuable and undoubtedly special. Racism seemed as wholly ridiculous to me then as it does today.

By 17, I had accepted the true potential of hugs, handshakes, laughs, tears, and smiles. I couldn’t communicate through written or spoken language all of the time, but I found strength in my awareness of instinctual body language, and the raw vulnerability of true honesty as it is linked to innocence. In all these moments, could I ever say that I was truly different from my sisters and brothers? Moments of connection happen for me all the time – regardless of age, gender, nationality, ethnic background or any other uncontrollable characteristics – when I am open to them.

While creating my home in Chico I have taken in some deeply important truths about life and living. We cannot control where we were born or where our ancestors came from. The past cannot be altered and must not be dwelt on. However, we are all responsible for the personal choices we are making NOW. We possess a duty to educate ourselves and engage one another in respectful discussions as we exchange honest, thoughtful expressions of truth. We all, regardless of any real or imagined

boundaries and borders, should sensibly share a universal interest in sustaining life on this planet to the best of our knowledge and abilities. We must live in full gratitude for the present while keeping an active investment in the eternal future. We all have a vote in the long-term legislation of our own communities and families – regardless of any perceived differences or socio-cultural distinctions.

As a species, we are more communicative and integrated than ever. We have come from a painful history of segregation, conquering, pillaging, pirating, extortion, and other forms of violence that have led to seizures of land from functional and thriving indigenous societies, and countless unnamed others. Rarely have large tracts of land been acquired “fairly” throughout time. The drawing of borders has always been about resources and

power. Therefore, it seems quite unreasonable to try to pinpoint where exactly, if at all, any loyalty to any government or political regime might ideally reside. Is my loyalty linked inextricably to my most recent ancestors or the current generation? Perhaps I must look even further back to my primordial single-celled bacterial ancestors; or perhaps thus to stardust...or maybe to nothing at all!

Regardless of political lines, we remain citizens of this PLANET and that is where my matriotism lies.

*Mercedes is a non-fiction writer and local activist focusing on the re-awakening of healthy, well-rounded citizens within her home community.*



Matriotism is the opposite of patriotism....A Patriot loves his/her country but does not buy into the exploitive phrase of "My country right or wrong." (As Chesterton said, that's like saying, "My mother, drunk or sober.") Not everyone is a mother, but there is one universal truth that no one can dispute no matter how hard they try (and believe me, some will try): Everyone has a mother! Mothers give life, and if the child is lucky, mothers nurture life. And if a man has had a nurturing mother he will already have a base of Matriotism.

*Cindy Sheehan*

# WHAT DOES PATRIOTISM MEAN TODAY?

EILEEN MORRIS

We progressives (for lack of a better word), seem to altogether avoid using the word *patriot*. We seem much more comfortable with the word *activist* when describing who we are and what we do about the things we care about. Do we shun *patriotism* due to concern over what has been done in its name? Perhaps we don't like labels in general but it is interesting to observe its absence in the public dialogue of activist communities. Have we made a mistake? Have we confused the word and its meaning with other things?

Teddy Roosevelt said "Patriotism means to stand by the country. It does not mean to stand by the president or any other public official... it is unpatriotic not to tell the truth, whether about the president or anyone else." He argues that to make the most of our rights to free speech, particularly in criticizing the actions of office holders, we are being genuinely patriotic. It is patriotic to study, write, examine and criticize and to demonstrate our views and goals for just and peaceful local, state, national and international policy. Given the severe disconnect between our ideals, our institutions, and our practices, patriotism today is, therefore, bold action. Seeking and telling the truth is standing bravely by the country and its collection of ideals.

We must distinguish loyalty or devotion to individual office holders as separate from loyalty and devotion to the principles of human rights and the social contract embodied in the rule of law. I sensed in the Post 9/11 era that some felt it was unpatriotic to criticize Bush Administration policies. Now, amongst some liberals, I sense a worry that it is unpatriotic to criticize President Obama and the policies of his administration. Roosevelt helps us to clarify that it is only unpatriotic *not* to do so, according to our own reason and conscience. Patriotism is standing by the country, not blind loyalty to a politician or political party.

Adlai Stevenson in a 1952 speech before the American Legion defines the basis for patriotism as "tolerance and a large measure of humility"—a prescient statement warning us, perhaps, about these recent notions of American exceptionalism appearing

in Obama's 2011 State of the Union address and in many Tea Party speeches. We need a patriotism that involves us in civil discourse bounded by respect, a patriotism that avoids hostility and requires an appreciation for the experiences and perspectives of others.

Stevenson further observes of his time and, I suggest, our own "... Among us who use 'patriotism' as a club for attacking other Americans... That betrays the deepest article of our faith, the belief in individual liberty and equality which has always been the heart and soul of the American idea." It is

patriotic to fight for tolerance and the ideals that unite us.

Patriotism today is faith in or devotion to principles and the noble effort to put them into practice. Stevenson leaves us with a concept of patriotism extremely relevant for today: "a patriotism which is not short, frenzied outbursts of emotion, but the tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime. The

dedication of a lifetime—these are words that are easy to utter, but this is a mighty assignment."

*Eileen Morris is a community member and an instructor of US government at CSU Chico and Butte College. When she is not with her family you can find her dancing.*



There are men among use who use "patriotism" as a club for attacking other Americans. What can we say for the self-styled patriot who thinks that a Negro, a Jew, a Catholic, or a Japanese-American is less an American than he? That betrays the deepest article of our faith, the belief in individual liberty and equality which has always been the heart and soul of the American idea....To me this is the type of "patriotism" which is, in Dr. Johnson's phrase, "the last refuge of scoundrels." The anatomy of patriotism is complex. But surely intolerance and public irresponsibility cannot be cloaked in the shining armor of rectitude and righteousness. Nor can the denial of the right to hold ideas that are different—the freedom of man to think as he pleases.

*Adlai Stevenson*

# PROTECTING HUMANS AND THE LAND

AMBROSIA KRINSKY

I won an essay contest in 4th grade writing on what the flag meant to me. Things were simpler then. I lived in the dichotomous world of right versus wrong, American versus un-American, etc. We were the best and I knew it. My teacher and Bush Senior told me it was so. My K-12 education was a feedback loop of American supremacy and exceptionalism.

I was 14 when the planes flew into the towers. Having discovered punk rock only months before I was beginning to question everything.

"If we truly are the best," I thought, "why have others attacked us?" None of it made sense to me, especially the argument that terrorists hated us because of our freedom, which was a pill too strange to swallow.

My generation of Americans grew up believing that freedom reigned supreme. Yet we have watched as freedoms have eroded with the Patriot Act and other legislation such as the National Defense Authorization Act, which states that US Citizens accused of associating with those deemed to be terrorist threats can be held in detention indefinitely without charges or trial. Then there's the statistic one of my professors at UC Berkeley shared with me: on average Americans are filmed by surveillance cameras upwards of 17 times a day! With all of these factors converging, I wonder what type of citizen this high level of scrutiny produces.

I find it instructive that the toxics we ship overseas make their way back to us via the hydrologic cycle. CO2 emissions spewed out by our industrial system, combined with outputs by other countries, have raised global temperatures, resulting in superstorms such as Hurricane Sandy, and record droughts the world over. The natural systems of Earth do not recognize national borders through a lens of *patriotism*. Why should we?

I don't like the word *patriotism*. It may have helped to found this country, but aside from the ruling merchant class it was never inclusive of the entire population. The highest rated entry for *patriotism* on urbandictionary.com goes like this: "Originally, a patriot was someone who loved their country and

supported it, but wouldn't blindly follow whatever their country's government did. These days, it is synonymous with Nationalist, which is someone who blindly follows whatever his country's government does, and lacks his own ability to think and reason for himself." I tend to concur.

Thankfully there are those among us looking to reframe our goals, recognizing the US as a nation of many different peoples, and promoting participatory self-governance. This gives me hope. I think the "No Justice, No Peace" slogan summarizes the situation well. Justice and peace are interwoven and dependent upon one another. Like oxygen and hydrogen they come together beautifully to hydrate life. The truth of

the matter is the US has yet to deal with the shady past of its original patriots: genocide, indoctrination, and the forced removals of the indigenous peoples whose ancestors have known this land since time immemorial. Unless you are one of them, this land is not your land. Woody Guthrie's 1940s classic folk anthem was incorrect, this land was stolen.

*Patriotism* needs to be re-branded! At this point in time to be

a patriot means protecting our landbases from those who would exploit them to the point of desertification. It means protecting America from becoming a natural gas exportation colony. It means holding spaces, thus forwarding social and environmental justice. It means the steady interweaving of that justice with the spirit and practice of peace.

*Ambrosia Krinsky is the Assistant to the Director at the Chico Peace and Justice Center.*



Unless our conception of patriotism is progressive, it cannot hope to embody the real affection and the real interest of the nation.

*Jane Addams*



# THIS LAND IS WHOSE LAND?

CHUCK GREENWOOD

“My land,” Genghis Khan told a friend that he trusted, in about 1200 AD. He’d roamed and he’d rambled from the barren Mongolian hills to Baghdad, from the Pacific Ocean to the Baltic Sea, backed by ten thousand fur-clothed plunderers carrying blood-washed swords.

Genghis’ horsemen were not the first. Humans had already spilled outward from the east coast of Africa to inhabit most of a planet, in the course of two thousand centuries. Attila, Caesar, Alexander. And they would not be the last—in our time Hitler, Chairman Mao’s Long March, Ben-Gurion’s troopers storming the Golan Heights, Vietnam. Other species did the same, before we began. *Indigenous* and *original* really only mean: how far back do you care to look?

A new kind of barbarian has appeared in our centuries. These new barbarians do not come from foreign regions, and they do not dress in fur or metal – they were raised in our towns, taught in our schools. They sing in our churches. They observe and they plan carefully, as the traditional human invasions continue – armies crossing borders, bulldozers and chainsaws destroying habitats — and they find new ways to subjugate and plunder. “Some men rob you with a six-gun,” Woody also sang — “And some with a fountain pen.”

The new barbarians establish dominion over governments by infiltration and bribery and purchase. Their war-horses are not the tough stubby ponies that Genghis would recognize — their mounts carry names like Monsanto, Halliburton, Chevron, Shell, CitiBank. And their weapons carry names like Thalidomide, GMO, fracking, subprime mortgage. But the differences end there. Where the barbarians have passed, a trail of trampled crops, ruined homes, and weeping villagers remains.

Men and women want to belong — belonging is our deepest dream, and exile our deepest dread. Belong to each other, to communities, to nations is our greatest strength and our greatest vulnerability. Patriotism seems to carry a promise of belonging, and so we give our allegiances willingly.

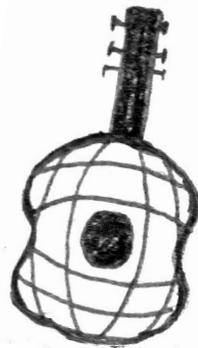
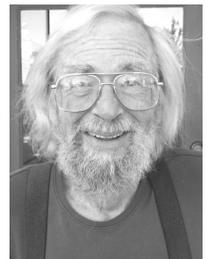
The barbarian knows this well. If he has

established dominion over a government, and twisted our need to belong into a dull subservience that is his definition of patriotism, then the allegiance of the population is, ultimately, to him. Of course it’s essential for his dominion to remain invisible, behind a wizard’s curtain — no schoolkid is going to recite, “I pledge allegiance to Monsanto,” with his hand over his heart. “Let the meek inherit the earth,” say Halliburton, Chevron, Shell — *as long as we get to inherit the meek, and define anybody who objects as unpatriotic.*

What takes my breath away about humanity is not that we’re so violent, so destructive—but that we’re still here at all despite the conquerors and plunderers. Somehow, in a quiet enduring defiance, intractable as ironwood, we’ve managed so far to recharge the great aquifers of decency and compassion that keep the world turning. Grandparents teaching the old essential skills — how to plant and tend and harvest, run a trapline, repair a wheel, pick a guitar; how to reduce the fever, bind the wound, wrap the dead, comfort the widowed.

How to judge a man by his behavior rather than for his beliefs, how to reach out to a neighbor in a hard time, how to find a common voice now and then. How to overthrow a tyrant, occasionally, if only to see if the next tyrant will be any different. How to come together in patriotic relation to block, neighborhood, town, tribe, watershed.

*Chuck Greenwood considers himself an activist—he is uneasy with the words “retired” and “gentleman.”*



Nobody living  
Can ever stop me  
As I go walkin'  
My freedom Highway  
Nobody living  
Can make me turn back:  
This land was made for you and me.  
Woody Guthrie

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## ABOUT THE VIEWSPAPER

The Chico Viewspaper is brought to you by the Chico Peace and Justice Center, a grassroots, community-based organization that works for peace, social justice, and environmental stewardship through the power of integral nonviolence. The *Viewspaper* is published quarterly and benefits greatly from the feedback of our readers. Feel free to write or email us with responses to the essays included in this edition and with your suggestions for topics you'd like to see the *Viewspaper* explore in future issues.

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